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THE PLACE OF LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN THE ARTICULATION OF COLLEGE AND HIGH SCHOOL LANGUAGE PROGRAMS.

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FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHERS FROM THE EARLIEST LEVELS THROUGH GRADUATE SCHOOL NEED TO JOIN FORCES TO DETERMINE OBJECTIVES AND DEVELOP CONTINUITY OF STUDY. TOO OFTEN COLLEGE FRESHMEN PLEAD INADEQUATE PREPARATION AND ARE PERMITTED TO DUPLICATE WORK ALREADY SATISFACTORILY PERFORMED IN HIGH SCHOOL. IF PRE-COLLEGE TRAINING PLACED GREATER EMPHASIS ON THE FOUR LANGUAGE SKILLS, THE ACQUIRED PROFICIENCY WOULD ENABLE STUDENTS TO MAKE THE TRANSITION FROM LANGUAGE STUDY TO LITERATURE. COLLEGE FACULTY, ON THE OTHER HAND, NEED GREATER APPRECIATION OF THE LEARNING PROCESS INVOLVED, AND SHOULD NOT EXPECT MATURE LITERARY JUDGMENT FROM YOUNG STUDENTS STILL BUILDING THEIR FOREIGN LANGUAGE COMPETENCY. INSTEAD OF ALTERNATING READING MATERIAL AND A REVIEW GRAMMAR, THE TEACHER OF THE TRANSITIONAL PERIOD, WHETHER IN HIGH SCHOOL OR COLLEGE, COULD PROVIDE CONTINUITY BY MEANS OF SKILLFULLY CONSTRUCTED EXERCISES TO DEDUCE GRAMMATICAL REVIEW FROM THE READING MATERIAL. THIS SPEECH WAS GIVEN AT A FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHER CONFERENCE AT ADELPHI UNIVERSITY, MARCH 9, 1967. (GJ)

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An address given at Adelphi University on March 9, 1967 at the opening of a conference of college and high school FL teachers. The conference addressed itself to the topic:

THE PLACE OF LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN THE ARTICULATION OF COLLEGE AND HIGH SCHOOL LANGUAGE PROGRAMS

by

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As I looked over the attractive brochure of this conference, reading its title and the exposition of its raison d'être, I was reminded of the answer I recently received from an NDEA Institute applicant to the request that 100 carefully chosen words be written, telling why the applicant thought he needed the training of the Institute. He wrote: "This is similar to asking 'how long is a piece of string.' In other words, this question is unanswerable as far as my knowing why I need anything at all. But by following the example of others, I come to the conclusion that this program would do me 'one world of good.'" etc. etc.

Now, I don't intend to be as fresh or as blunt as that young man, but I do have a few questions to pose: Is the problem of a lack of articulation between college and high school FL teachers any more critical today than it was yesterday, or are we simply more aware of it? And even if we present college and high school points of view in a single setting, will a single sitting do the trick?

Since at least 1954 FL teachers in ever-increasing numbers have been addressing themselves to these problems, from NECTFL and the FL Program of MLA, down thru the many national and local AAT's, the FL Federations, to the recently-born ACTFL (rimes with tactful: American Council of Teachers of FLs). While many of the programs of these groups have been directed

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to secondary and elementary school FL programs, the vocal participants have come more from the colleges than from the schools. Does this mean that the colleges have had a greater interest at stake than the schools? Yes and No. Yes -- because these energetic college participants have helped to gain much respectability for FLs in the curriculum at all educational levels and have caused great ferment in methods and in teaching materials. No -- because, alas, it seems that these college teachers have been more successful in convincing or strengthening the convictions of their conference audiences than they have been within their own ivory-towered departments.

Have you ever noticed how the audience changes at the Christmas MLA meetings as soon as the abstruse but scholarly papers are finished and the more mundane FL matters come up for discussion? With precious few exceptions, the scholars depart for their towers, to write more articles. Occasionally of course their articles turn out to be not so scholarly, when they, for example, deplore the second year high school FL course that has not yet started to read literature seriously.

I believe that the high school teachers at these conferences have been more successful in spreading the word at home, but the result of this spread reminds me of the diffusion that started to take place among the protest-ants even before Martin Luther's death. More about this later -- for now, suffice it to say that the high school teachers have probably been affected in greater numbers by the changes in FL teaching materials and methods.

To come back to the point of the fresh NDEA applicant: do we know why we need conferences such as this? Of course we do, and we also like to say that they do us a world of good. But do they? I venture to say that in most -- or should I be more charitable and say in many -- schools and colleges the teachers

and professors seem to have too little time or interest to find out what the fellow teaching in the next room is doing. So what hope is there that we here today, who represent many schools and several colleges, will be able to establish more than a momentary dialogue about our common problems? I say we must make it a continuing dialogue on this local level, if we have any hopes for at least an adequate solution to our problems. We must learn about each other's programs, methods and materials, and we must learn to learn from each other. We should do much more visiting of each other's classrooms -- this is a relatively easy way to keep a dialogue going, for who has the time to attend, let alone plan such a conference as this more than once or twice a year?

In addition to the several colleges and many schools represented here today, we note on the program that the three most commonly taught FLs are to be honored by separate panels. Fully aware of how difficult it is to get together any panel of educators, I still ask the question: where is the panel for Russian, for Italian, for the more exotic languages? And where is the panel for Latin? (Surely you will join me and, incidentally, William Riley Parker, in deploring the rapid decrease in the study of Latin, a demise being hastened, I am afraid, by many Latin teachers.) No -- I like to think that this conference with its three panels is intended to represent all foreign languages, for I am convinced that we must know each other as never before, and stick together for the struggles that surely lie ahead. The new organization which I mentioned before -- ACTFL -- is the first attempt to join together in one national organization all teachers of all FLs, from Kindergarten thru graduate school. And if ACTFL's plans materialize, it will soon have its own publication, the Modern Language Journal (whose title will somehow be

jiggered to remove the word "modern"). I urge you all to give ACTFL and its activities your heartiest support.

What is the situation of high school FLs today? Here in New York State we have a syllabus for most FLs -- as a beginning it is excellent, but unfortunately its size makes it more of a reference book than a syllabus, and it sometimes gives the impression of trying to be all things to all men. In this state we have language study by levels, not by years, but where is the school principal who honors the difference? And then we have the new Regents examinations -- far better than the old, but still not good enough -- and they get easier or harder, as the previous year's percentage of failures is higher or lower than the mystical 75 per cent. Unfortunately the Regents make a deplorable large number of teachers feel that they must teach for the Regents, rather than teaching French, even tho many of them will admit that these examination requirements are very minimal.

There is much good, hard, effective work going on today in Long Island's high school classes in FLs. Those of us in college get to see, more and more, these good results. A few schools even manage AP courses, but the few successful pupils seem to end up mostly in the prestige colleges. Unfortunately, the picture is not all rosy: many high school classes are gung-ho for listening and speaking skills, but they seem to think that the only thing to do after memorizing and stultifying one dialog -- is to memorize another. And some schools are proud that they have not succumbed to the fad, and are still teaching grammar-translation -- they support their approach by saying (and they're probably right) that their students do beautifully on the college boards. But I ask: how valuable is the rather limited knowledge required by these examinations?

There may be many, but I think there are entirely too few high schools where FLs are taught with careful regard to all four skills: where as much grammar as was ever necessary for control of a given FL is still taught and used; where culture and civilization is not an activity for TUESDAY in the teacher's plan book, but instead is an integral part of every day's lesson; where belletristic literature is introduced only to the extent that the pupils can experience it and talk about it (in the FL!), instead of the teacher's conducting a psychedelic monolog, and that often in English.

In short, these good schools know what their objectives are and they pursue them with vigor. They are not satisfied to accept lock-stock-and-barrel a hurriedly-assembled teacher's manual in place of their own carefully worked-out program. They leave lots of room for the teacher's personality within the framework of the agreed-upon objectives.

The poor and mediocre high school FL classes send the colleges students who clamor to begin their FL all over again -- and the colleges, too, suffer no lack of sympathetic guidance counselor's ears. The good FL teachers send the colleges real students who want to go on from where they left off -- and these students are not panicked by the thought that they haven't had, for example, the future anterior passive in their high school class or that they might not have learned exactly the same vocabulary that the colleges teach from their beginners' textbooks. But they have a feeling of security, for they have learned to hear and give rejoinders to more than the restaurant-type question. They have learned to read with a fair degree of speed and without frequent, conscious translation to the mother tongue. And they have learned to write down -- in much simpler form of course -- the things they have heard and spoken and read.

Now what happens on the college scene? What is bad in high school is also bad in college, only more so. As mentioned a moment ago, many college students are permitted to begin their high school FL over again -- a deplorable practice which makes entrance requirements mere paper requirements. Many new college students, when placed in an FL class by some sort of test, panic after one or two class sessions and badger people until they are permitted to change to a lower level. Of course, at the other extreme, I have already mentioned the students who continue where they left off and do good work.

But what about the rest? Those who place in the third or fourth semester of college FL and stay there because they can't find a mouthpiece to intercede? I think that some make the grade, by dint of sheer will power, or more likely by the skill of the teacher. But many of them are lost -- thrown to the wolves by a college teacher who decides that he'll show these dumb kids what they don't know, rather than finding out what they do know and building on it. You have all heard -- from other areas of the country of course -- of the prima donna who knows the young college students with her great (and expected) ability to speak the FL. And after a few days of this she demands that they write a 500-word autobiography.

I have obviously overstated the case (I hope), but I seriously pose the question: do enough college teachers of FL pay attention to the learning process that young people have to go thru to learn an FL? Or do they merely assume that the students will speak just because the teacher does or that they will become real readers by plowing thru so many pages of text with little help other than a few questions which are either so simple as to be ridiculous or so deep as to be far beyond the students' linguistic capabilities? Or do they expect the students will be able to write a critique of <u>L'étranger</u> simply because they have gotten thru the book? Or do they expect that the students will be able to discuss difficult works of literature, simply because they have

gone thru A-L M Levels One and Two plus a Review Grammar?

I suggest that there is a lot of wishful thinking going on in the college FL classroom; that college teachers are so convinced of the liberalizing affect of FL study that they don't stop to consider that most college students who stop FL after the fourth semester have been so bored and/or confused that the whole experience often adds up to a big waste of time.

If I seem to be taking pot shots at the FL requirement of the bachelor's degree as it now stands, I am; but I hasten to add that most other general college requirements, as they are carried out, are just as vulnerable. That, however, is a topic for a different conference -- so let's get back to our own problems.

To paraphrase the beer-makers: we must be doing something wrong. By "we" I of course mean all of us: high school and college teachers. As I see it, we often, to begin with, do not have our specific objectives in mind. For example, if speaking ability is one of our objectives -- and I hope it is -- do we confuse memorization of a dialog or basic sentences plus a few canned questions with real speaking -- or do we use these valuable devices as a springboard, with variations ad infinitum? I suppose I am suggesting that we are entirely too tied to the textbook and to the teacher's manual, as though these automatically met our objectives.

We must insist that our high school FL programs of three years or more be real programs, and in college these students must not be permitted to go over the beginning steps again. In the colleges we must learn to expect that these students know something, but not everything.

Once we have straightened out the first two high school years and the first

two college semesters -- for right or wrong these two are usually equated -- we come to the next, perhaps most crucial step of our teaching process: the third high school year or third college semester. What do we try to do here? Usually we try to introduce serious reading, even getting into some worthwhile literature, while at the same time we feel compelled to continue the formal study of grammar and to further develop written composition. We sometimes even add a cultural reader.

The high schools are here perhaps a little better off than the colleges, for they often use a set of materials which continues in an integrated way the process of the first two years, although we hope on a somewhat more sophisticated level. The colleges, however, usually select two textbooks for their third and even fourth semesters: a grammar review, with its attendant composition exercises, and a reader. Aside from the fact that listening and speaking skills are often neglected (except for the teacher's own practice), grammar and reading are treated as two unrelated phases of the FL: rarely does the grammar review text take up the topics as they appear in the reader. The result is that new grammar is learned and old grammar is reviewed, with the special vocabulary of the particular text, and reading is done with a different set of grammar topics and vocabulary. The two activities often bear no relationship to one another, whereas they ought to be mutually reenforcing. Consider for a moment what the student goes thru: in a given lesson of the grammar review book he may drill for example some special uses of the subjunctive and write many English-to-FL sentences, all of which drill this very point. In the reader he might wait weeks before he comes to one or two of these special subjunctives, and the chances are he has forgotten, because in the meantime the grammar review has gone on to the passive voice, to reflexive verbs, to special adjective problems, etc.

What I am suggesting is that this third semester college course, and perhaps also the third year high school course, should stop trying to teach isolated although well-drilled grammar, but instead should make the reading text the point of departure for all other work: listening, speaking and writing. Such a plan must presuppose that the first two college semesters or high school years have taught all the basic grammar: i.e. all the function words, the commonly used tenses and moods, grammatical cases and other basic points of syntax and morphology. This would then leave the next course to review all these things in context and as they are needed, and new points of grammar -- the relatively infrequent points -- would be treated as new work.

Now, will reading as it is commonly done be sufficient for this purpose? Not unless most teachers use more imagination than I suspect and not if they do not go beyond the drill aids supplied in most reading texts. (You know the kind of exercises I mean: a few questions per chapter, either too easy or too profound, plus a variety of grammar exercises that the author has supplied at the behest of the publisher -- and our smart students often let the unwary teacher do most of the work) I suggest that we need a progressive development of vocabulary and grammar problems as the reader is read. For example, every page or every few pages of the reader can have some exercises w such as the following types:

1. Give the students the chance to use important vocabulary and structure, selected by the teacher, in some sentence-building exercises. (These will partially imitate the text.)
2. Next can come some kind of exercise that causes the student to write similar sentences to the first exercise: a translation type or recall cue can be used here effectively, going from the complete known to variations made possible by the structure sophistication already gained.

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3. At this point the students are ready for some real questions on the reading text. (Not of the type: Who was in the kitchen? but Why did Pablo go into the kitchen?) By virtue of the preceding exercises the student is linguistically capable of giving an answer that supplies more than one little piece of information.
4. As a final type of exercise, a few cues can be given with the directions that the student should make up a whole paragraph. This paragraph will of course be an imitation of something already read in the text, but it will not reflect all the intricacies of style of the original author.

Look what is gained by such a system of exercises: repeated use of many new vocabulary words and manipulation of structure so that it becomes natural to the student. And after such a series of exercises the student can go back to the few pages of text and read them with enjoyment and probably with little if any reference to his mother tongue.

To the objection that such a process is slow, I say: it certainly is, but the rewards in developed skills can be great. (Don't forget that the above-mentioned exercises ought to be both of the oral and written variety.) As the weeks go on there will be less and less structure that needs drilling, thus making it possible to speed up the process.

Another big question that poses somewhat of a problem for us: What shall we have our students read, starting in the third semester or year? I hope you will agree with me that they should not read literature for esthetic enjoyment and with an eye to literary criticism until they have learned to read (what the late George Scherer in the 1963 NEC Reading Report called the liberated stage of reading).

I do not mean that literature, and good literature, cannot be used while the students are still learning to read. (We all know how stultifying can be a steady diet of pedagogically-prepared readings.) But we must select our literature with care: e.g. it must say something to the age group before us, the poems or stories or plays should not be long; it must not be an author who overdoes the use of esoteric terms and structure.

I have only briefly mentioned the place of culture in the FL program -- this is often an issue hot enough to split open an AAT meeting. There seem to be two extremes in vogue:

1. To use a special cultural reader.

or 2. To let culture and civilization grow out of the textbooks basic to the course.

In using a cultural reader we run the risk of using up much valuable reading time with a text that is primarily intended to impart information, not further language learning. If we follow the second choice of letting culture stem from the basic texts, our students will flunk the Culture part of the Regents, even though we may get across much valuable cultural information, depending upon our experience and skills as teachers.

I would prefer a combination of the two. Some American-published cultural readers are excellent, and much of the material can be read exclusively as outside reading, followed by some discussion and content-testing in class. Better yet would be many books printed in the foreign country: not those dry histories written by and for the university scholars, but those written for the children in, say, grades 5 thru 10.

I have wandered all about in this little talk, but I hope I have caused you

to think a little about what you do in your school and in your classroom. Perhaps I have made you angry, and I hope I have. For if nothing is wrong that I have suggested is wrong, then the message wasn't intended for you. But please take it back to a few people you must know.

Thank you.

Please note: The author is indebted to the Reading Committee Report (William Moulton, Chairman) of the 1967 NEC for its many valuable suggestions on developing the reading skill.